



Ashford Pollinator Pathway News

By Jennifer Sterling-Folker, April 2023

Happy Spring Ashford! With spring comes renewed efforts by Ashford Pollinator Pathways (PP) to encourage gardeners and land-owners to include native plants for pollinators and wildlife while reducing lawn sizes and avoiding the use of pesticides. PP began in Wilton, CT with volunteers from town conservation organizations working together to establish pollinator-friendly habitat and food sources. Email us (AshfordPollinatorPathways@gmail.com) with questions, if you'd like site/plant advice, a list of native plant nurseries, to visit a native plant garden or to get involved. Also let us know if you register your land with Pollinator Pathways so we can drop off a free medallion courtesy of the Ashford Conservation Commission. Our Facebook page will have more information and events in the coming months (<https://www.facebook.com/AshfordPollinatorPathway>).

Can You Resist the Siren Call of Early Spring Cleanup? I find it VERY difficult to resist cleaning up the leaf debris and old flower stalks in my garden on an early spring day. But many pollinators, like bees and butterflies, overwinter in dead plant material and by removing it too early we risk destroying many of these pollinators. Some bees don't emerge until late May, so the longer we can tolerate a "messy" garden the better for pollinators and other wildlife. A good rule of thumb is to wait until temperatures are consistently about 50 degrees Fahrenheit over several days. This helps protect their habitat until they can safely emerge, thereby ensuring a healthy pollinator population. It also improves your overall garden ecosystem, as decomposing leaf litter is good for the soil and many spring wildflowers need a layer of leaf litter in order to emerge.

Free Native Plant Seeds: As with last year, we have provided native plant seed packets free to Ashford residents and available at Ashford Library as part of their annual Seed Bank. There are 10 different seeds, all the easy-to-grow variety that do not need cold stratification.

Coming Soon: "NO MOW MAY!" Ashford PP is collaborating with young conservationists in Ashford School's third grade to learn about No Mow May and develop ideas on how residents can participate. The idea is to avoid mowing grass for the month of May so that lawn weeds, such as clover, violets and dandelions, can bloom and provide vital spring food for bees emerging from hibernation and birds foraging to feed young. If you really hate the idea of not mowing your entire lawn until June, you could leave patches unmown (perhaps in your backyard or an unused area behind a shed) or mow the edges of your lawn and leave a few meandering paths down the middle. Even small efforts help pollinators survive & thrive!



Calendar

4/5 – NCCD's deadline for ordering from its annual native plant sale, BUT they may still have some plants available for late ordering and often have plants for sale on their pick-up days (4/21 & 4/22) at 24 Hyde Avenue Vernon. For more info: <https://conservect.org/northcentral/plant-seed-sale/>

4/29, 10AM – I will be speaking about the "Do's and Don'ts of Native Plant Gardening" at Hampton Fletcher Memorial Library, 257 Main St, Hampton. This is a free native plant talk based on my experiences trying to establish a native plant garden and wildlife habitat in my own yard in Ashford.

5/13 -- RI's Wild Plant Society's Early Native Plant Sale in Saunderstown, RI, featuring Spring ephemerals and early blooms. Their larger plant sale is on June 3 in Kingston RI. For more info see: <https://riwps.org/native-plant-sales/>

6/3-6/4 -- Grow Native Massachusetts Plant Sale, 240 Beaver St, Waltham, MA. Must register in advance, see info at: <https://grownativemass.org/Our-Programs/plant-sale>

6/10 & 6/11, 10AM-5PM – Annual Local Art and Garden Tour. The tour is free and self-guided. Map and info at their website: <https://artgardenct.com>

Ashford PP will once again host a table at the Ashford Arts Council summer event at Westford Hill Distillers (Date TBA). We will have information and some native plant seedlings to give away free at this event. Stay tuned for more info.